CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

Graduate Studies News

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From the Dean's Desk: The Ethics of Grading

Social Science & Humanities Research Council Award Winners in History:
– Andrea Levy
– Maryann Farkas

Upcoming Doctoral Examinations

From the Dean's Desk

The Ethics of Grading

Almost by definition, every university is dedicated to academic excellence. Its reputation rests on the shoulders and the quality of its graduates. How is this quality to be measured? Traditionally, it has been accepted that the grades received in courses of study constitute such a measure.

Even in the sciences, the assignment of a grade for work done is a matter of human judgment and not reducible to an automatic or mechanical operation. The nuances of examination questions and the possibility that answers may be subject to different interpretations, are such that examinations can and often are designed to achieve a desired distribution of grades. If this fails, the statistical normalization process is sometimes called into service, the basis and precise nature of which are by no means universally accepted.

In administering an evaluation process, we tend to function within accepted principles of the distribution of talent and achievement of reasonably sized populations. Occasionally, these principles are violated in formally irreproachable but ethically unacceptable ways.

Concordia University participates with McGill University, the Université de Montréal, and the Université du Québec à Montréal in joint doctoral programs. The grading systems of these universities are all different. Concordia and the Université du Québec assign A's, B's, and a limited number of C's to acceptable graduate work. McGill assigns A's (85-100), A-'s (80-84), B+'s (75-79), B's (70-74), and B-'s (65-69) to similar work, and the Université de Montréal uses percentages, without letter designations.

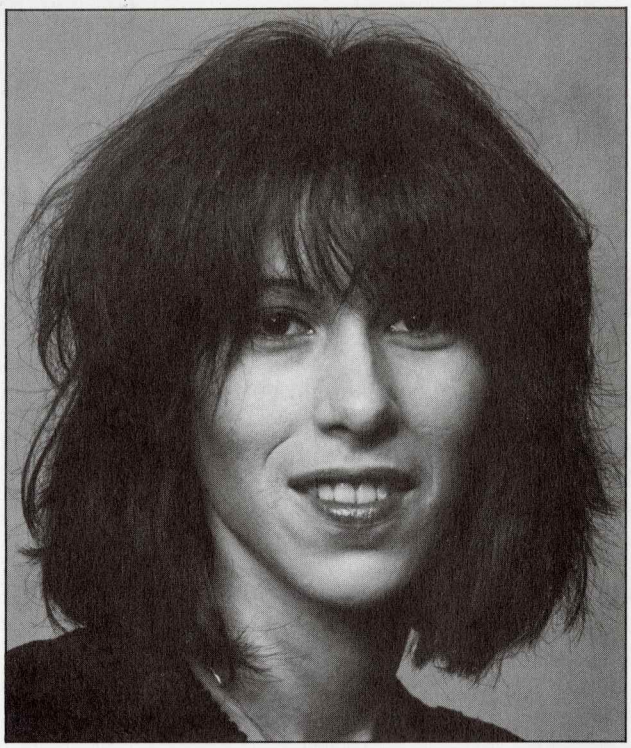
The Conférence des recteurs et des principaux des universités du Québec has produced a conversion chart that is used by university registrars to transfer grades between the systems. On the face of it, the problem of grade conversion has therefore been solved. Unfortunately, there is an ethical side to these grading systems that has caused considerable anguish to some students whose cases I had to plead.

Consider the plight of a McGill graduate student who takes a Concordia graduate course, receives a C grade in the course, and would like to have the graduate credit transferred to McGill. Since C's are unacceptable to the McGill Graduate School, the requested transfer is refused. On the other hand, a Concordia professor reveals to the student that her percentage grade in the course was above 75, judged to be a C by the Concordia professor. The basis of this claim by the professor is that only an 80 percent score is adequate for a B. Using the CREPUQ translation chart, a mark of 75 actually corresponds to a B+ at McGill. Should McGill accept the Concordia grade for graduate credit?

If a professor were to claim that a B grade corresponds to 80 percent or more, then this claim is clearly in conflict with general North American practice of considering this level of achievement to be within the A range at the graduate level. The line between academic freedom and scholarly responsibility may be fine and subtle, but professorial judgment must surely be guided by common sense as well as evaluative principles.

M. E. Szabo
Dean

Andrea Levy



Andrea Levy

"I'm interested in the way philosophers have interpreted the world, but also in the myriad more practical ways on which they have tried to contribute to changing it," states Andrea Levy, doctoral student in the Department of History.

Even as a child, Levy was brought up on progressive politics. At the kitchen table she was nourished as much by the debates as the meals. At no time during high school did Levy have a fancy for history. She felt that the subject, as it was taught, merely tested the ability to memorize rather than allow any form of interpretation.

CEGEP at Vanier was a liberating experience. She enrolled in a History of China course. Her professor clearly loved history and was very passionate about his work. His teaching methods were unique to Levy. He showed her how the past bears on the present: history is both continuity and change. She registered for two other history courses, one on Russia, and the other entitled 'The History of Imperialism'.

In 1978, although she had applied to McGill University in the Faculty of Law, Levy decided to enroll for a B.A. with a major in history at Concordia. During her first year, she switched from the major to an honours program. In the second year of the honours program, Levy began thinking about doing graduate work and also became a member of the Concordia University History Society. She chose the subject of "Isaac Deutscher" as the topic of her B.A. Honours essay and received the 'Martin Lewis Memorial Book Prize in History', awarded for academic excellence. She became the vice-president of the Concordia University History Society, and in 1981, Levy graduated with a Bachelor of Arts with Distinction, Honours in History.

She applied to and was accepted into the M.A. program in History, more specifically, European Intellectual History, and was awarded the following fellowships: the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Special M.A. Scholarship and the Concordia University Fellowship. By now, politics had become a consuming interest for Levy. She became an active member of both the Mouvement Socialiste and the Montreal Citizens' Movement. At the same time she was enrolled in two graduate seminars. U.S. Historiography and the second, entitled, "Rebels and Revolutionaries in Modern History" which was given by George Rudé. Levy states: "...it was a great privilege to study with an historian of the calibre of George Rudé".

During the second year of the master's program, Levy received the F.C.A.R. M.A. scholarship. This was also the year of the Montreal municipal elections and Levy became very active working for the MCM candidate in her district. After this election, she joined the MCM local association in Côte-des-Neiges devoting more time to politics and less to her studies. All that remained to complete her requirements for her M.A. was one overdue paper and her thesis.

In 1983-1984, fearing her degree might be in jeopardy, she withdraw from all her activities and spent the following months writing the essay which would eventually evolve into her master's thesis, "Autopsy of a Friendship: Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, 1943-1952". As Levy described it: "...the essay sought to elucidate the origins and substance of the philosophical and political differences that marked and ultimately destroyed the professional and personal relationship of Sartre and Camus. I also attempted to cast light on a broader historical problem: the dilemma of the left-wing intellectual during the Cold War, when the community of writers and scholars was increasingly polarized into two hostile camps, one spilling ink for Washington, the other for Moscow." Upon graduation, Levy was awarded the E.E. McCullough M.A. History Award.

Between 1985-1989, Levy was heavily involved in the disarmament movement. She applied for a grant from the Québec Youth Secretariat to fund a community peace education project which involved, among other things, organizing a referendum to declare her neighbourhood a nuclear free zone, as a means of pressuring the city administration to declare Montreal a nuclear weapons free zone. Following this experience she was asked to write an article for a book on the International Nuclear Free Zone movement. It was published under the title, "Community Disarmament Initiatives" in the collection of essays, 'Roots of Peace', edited by Eric Shragge et al. During this time, she had become a member of the Central Executive Committee of the MCM and served as conseillère à la formation. Levy was instrumental in making the disarmament issue more central to party's program.

After working for several years as a free-lance writer, translator and public relations consultant for Bell Canada, Levy decided to return to academia. She applied to the doctoral program in history at Concordia, to work with Dr. John Laffey, Professor of Modern European History.

He had been her thesis supervisor for her master's and accepted her as a doctoral student. She felt that the Department of History at Concordia was a sound intellectual environment and was familiar with the quality of its faculty. Her doctoral courses include, "Contemporary European Intellectual History" with required readings of: Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Weber and Freud. In fulfillment of her program requirements she is also studying the German language.

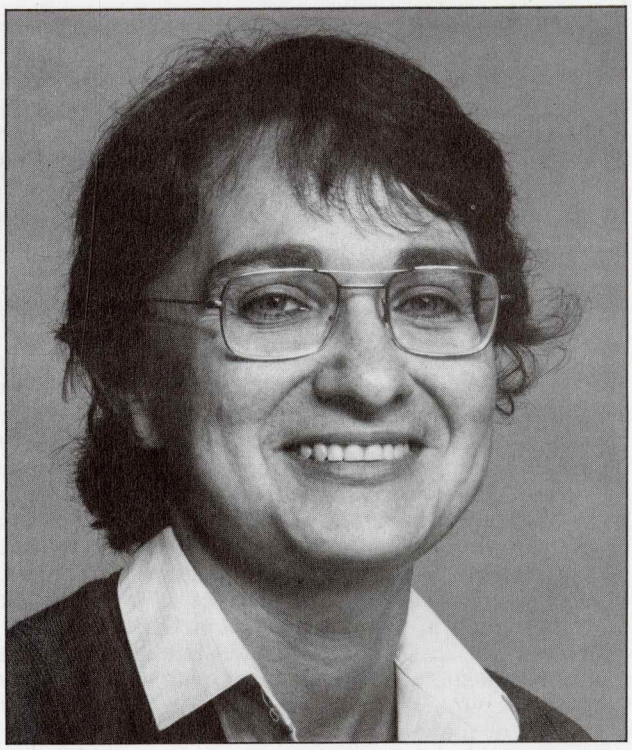
"...I am contemplating as a dissertation topic a critical study of the lifework of Isaac Deutscher. Easily one of the most perspicacious and penetrating analysts of Soviet history and politics, Deutscher has been paid puzzlingly scant attention by Western intellectual historians, and his fertile career, fraught with struggle, has failed to inspire the efforts of a single biographer. Deutscher exemplifies the problem of the independent intellectual, actively committed to radical social transformation. Expelled from the Polish Communist Party in 1932, Deutscher joined the Left Opposition led by Trotsky. He remained active in this organization until 1938, withdrawing his affiliation in protest over the creation of the Fourth International. Exiled in Britain from the outset of World War II, Deutscher found himself completely isolated politically throughout the 1950's. Reviled by the Right for his vociferous opposition to the Cold War, despised by the Communists for his relentless criticism of Stalinism, Deutscher even aroused the suspicion and mistrust of the organized Trotskyists with his eschewal of all dogma. It was during this sober period that he produced the unexcelled biographies of Trotsky and Stalin that distinguished him as a consummate historian. By identifying the social, political and cultural influences that bore on his development and by situating his work in the historical context of Stalinism and the Cold War, I would be concerned in my dissertation to arrive at some understanding of Deutscher as both a scholar and an activist; an individual who not only meditated on the course of European history in the twentieth century, especially as it was altered irrevocably by the Russian Revolution, but moreover, consciously sought out to insert himself as an agent in the historical process," explains Levy in her Ph.D proposal.

In conclusion, Levy states, "I think it is incumbent for historians to recognize and reveal their own political biases, because no method, to my mind, is value-free."

Maryann Farkas

Maryann Farkas was born in Leroy, Saskatchewan but grew up in Windsor, Ontario. Her refugee parents imbued in her a left-wing perspective, a natural consequence of their oppressed and racially prejudiced experiences in the old country. Two years into the B.A. program in History at the University of Windsor, Farkas left home and the confinements of Windsor and went off to a brave new world, situated at the University of Western Ontario.

During the summer of 1968, Farkas decided to come to Concordia to take a course entitled: "American Labour



Maryann Farkas

History" given by Herbert G. Gutman. This move was to make clearer much of her future personal and academic outlooks and goals.

She returned to London, graduating from the University of Western Ontario in June 1969. With her B.A. in History she moved to Montreal and eventually found a job as a clerk at the Royal Victoria Hospital. While at RVH, Farkas worked diligently to change the employee situation from a company union to a trade union. A union for non- professional workers was instituted. Ironically, the union did not include the clerical workers. By this time, Farkas was married and had a small child to care for.

In 1982, Farkas took in a docu-drama which concerned itself with workers in a textile plant in the American South who were attempting to bring in a union. It pitted men against women, blacks against whites. The technical adviser for this film was Herbert G. Gutman. For Farkas, it was to be more than just a film screening. It was a depiction of real life situations. It made her remember Herbert Gutman's teachings so many years ago, and brought home the relevancy of history and how history deals with real human issues. This note struck a familiar chord with her left-wing upbringing. The witnessing of this film would testify to Farkas' deep interest for the discipline of history and serve as the principle catalyst for her return to her studies after a long absence. Concordia was the logical choice of universities. She knew some of the professors and since Concordia had a well-established reputation for accomodating older students, the remaining psychological barrier of returning to studies after an absence of over a decade was overcome. Beginning as an independent student, Farkas rapidly applied to the master's program and was accepted for her qualifying year. She received straight A's in all her courses, and in Fall '85, Farkas was accepted into the M.A. program in History

and was awarded an assistantship. Her husband, Simon, by now working on his master's thesis, found a full-time job which enabled Farkas to return to full-time studies. And so finally she was able to find a bit of that elusive freedom she was so looking for when she left her home in Windsor. Her husband was out taking care of business while she took two master's courses at night and led three conferences during the week. She even found free time to spend with her son, Martin, on daycare outings.

Fall of '86 saw Farkas continuing with an assistantship with the same professor as the year before and working on her master's essay entitled: "Best of Enemies: Quebec Doctors and the State, 1930 - 1970". The essay addressed the response of the Quebec medical profession to the growth of state intervention in health care in Quebec from the Great Depression to the inauguration of Medicare, as we now know it, in 1970. As outlined in Farkas' abstract, "While the medical profession is the main focus of the essay, it is situated in the social and political context of increased state involvement in social welfare. There is an attempt to understand the forces pushing the Canadian and Quebec states to further implication in social welfare and to situate doctors, a strong 'pressure group' with a fear of government control, in this process. Using analyses of the nature of the welfare state, and the characteristics of professions, the essay traces the resistance of the medical profession to state intervention, and examines the way in which the profession manages to ensure that the structure of the medicare program suits its needs".

In 1987, she won the award for best M.A. original History essay upon completion of her Master of Arts in History degree. Farkas applied to the Université de Montréal's doctoral program in the History of Medicine primarily to work with Dr. Othmar Keel. She felt, though, that the doctorate offered at Concordia was broader in scope. When it became apparent that it would still be possible to work with Dr. Keel and with her M.A. thesis advisor, Dr. Mary Vipond, she decided on Concordia and accepted an assistantship. Despite the anxiety of a difficult pregnancy Farkas applied for the SSHRC and the FCAR, and in spring of 1989 she received letters from both foundations informing her that she had been granted both fellowships.

Farkas' comprehensive fields are Modern Canadian History, including General Political History, Social and Labour History and works relating to the Development of Social Policy in Canada, under Dr. Vipond; History of Social Policy and the State in Europe with Dr. W. Hubbard; and History of Medicine and Health Care Policy in Europe, the U.S. and Canada, under Dr. O. Keel of the Université de Montréal are her comprehensive fields.

Farkas' doctorate thesis entitled, "Home to Hospital: Private to Public (The Evolution of Health Care in Quebec 1940-1975)", continues her study of the development of the health care system in Quebec, the subject of her M.A. original essay. The thesis examines the interplay of the growth of need and demand for a universal system, the response of the state and the nature of the system that has resulted. She states, "...After 1940, there was a movement away from treatment in the home or office to hospital-centered care and the transfer of responsibility for health care costs from the individual to the public domain through state hospital insurance and medicare. One side of the issue states that the universal health care system under government control is a mechanism of social control.

Vincente Navarro, on the other hand, '...presents a reform such as universal health care as a compromise between the main class forces in British society, the result being a system that satisfies some working-class demands while at the same time legitimizing and securing the position of the dominant class and reproducing within the health care system the structures, social relations and inequalities of class society.' Navarro's analysis will serve as an important part of the analytical framework of my research, states Farkas. My study will examine four basic elements: the increase in levels of government funding and involvement; the actual changes in that section, including the growth of hospitals as centres of treatment, the increased specialization within these institutions, and the appearance of new groups of workers, both professional and auxiliary, in the health care field; the changing patters of use of health care facilities by the public; and the response of both those working in the system and the clientele to the above transformations. These elements are not independent; today's health care system is essentially the result of the interplay between these factors." An impressive fact. During the 1940s, the health status of the population of Quebec was amongst the poorest in Canada. Some fifty years later, today the Quebec Medicare System is one of the best and most comprehensive in the world.

During the summer of '89, Farkas taught a survey course in history. Despite lost sleep and family obligations, it was the first course she had designed, organized and agonized over. She says, "I really want to be a professor of history. I've spent so many years at jobs I didn't like. I like history and I like teaching very much. I guess that's where I'm going to be."

Upcoming Doctoral Examinations

Candidate: John de la Mothe, Dept. of Humanities
Thesis Title: C.P. Snow and the Struggle of Modernity
Examination: Friday, November 24, 1989 at 3:00 p.m. in H-769

Candidate: David Anthony Biro, Dept. of Chemistry
Thesis Title: Photochemical Charge Transfer across the Electrolyte/Electrode Interface Mediated by Polymers Doped with Dithiolene Complexes
Examination: Friday, December 1, 1989 at 10:00 a.m. in Room H-769

Candidate: Lois Colle, Dept. of Psychology
Thesis Title: Mesoliminbic Contribution to Dopamine-Depression Circling Behavior
Examination: Monday, December 4, 1989 at 9:30 a.m. in H-773

Candidate: Denise Messmer, Dept. of Psychology
Thesis Title: Visual Habituation Performance in Complication-Free Preterms at 4 months Corrected age
Examination: Monday, December 4, 1989 at 11:30 a.m. in H-773

All the above examinations will take place in the Hall Building, 1455 de Maisonneuve Blvd. West, Montreal.

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